

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
December 14, 2006

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Elsie Fetterman, Doris Holden, Rosemary Kofler, Tom McAuley, Barbara Sutherland, David Yaukey

Absent: Ed Kaler, Susan Whitbourne,

Select Board Liaison: Gerry Weiss

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Marlene Barnett (Program Coordinator)

Absent: Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Jeanette Miller

Guests: Shirley Packard, Ellie Vanetzian, Marge Babb

Welcome:

Barbara Sutherland, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:04 AM. Nancy introduced guests Shirley Packard and Ellie Vanetzian. Both have been concerned with senior health and wellness for decades and are on the Senior Health Advisory Committee.

Minutes of September Meeting:

The minutes of the November 16, 2006 meeting were corrected by Rosemary and Elsie. They were approved and accepted as corrected.

Senior Trust Treasurer's Report:

Doris distributed copies of the report. She reported two donations for a total of \$50.00. The report was approved and accepted.

NEW BUSINESS

Senior Health Advisory Committee:

Shirley Packard, retired geriatric Nurse Practitioner, was responsible for establishing the Nursing (Wellness) Center at the Amherst Senior Center. Shirley explained the history of the Wellness Center. While she was Chair of the COA and working as a NP at the Wellness Center in Chicopee, Shirley realized the value of such a center for seniors. She worked with Ellie Venetzian, a retired Associate Professor of Nursing at UMass, for two years to establish a Wellness Center in Amherst. The Center was approved in the early 1990s. Shirley found donors to run the Wellness Center and the \$10,000/ year contributions continue to this day. Since there was only one nurse working at the Center, Shirley saw the need for an Advisory Board to support, guide, help and advise the nurse. The Board was interested in data, outcomes and unmet needs or unassessed problems, but compliance with providing such data and outcomes has been a problem. Thus the Advisory Board felt they could no longer carry on their role. The Nursing Center is now under the Board of Health supervision. Nevertheless, the Advisory Board (now known as the Senior Health Advisory Group) continued to be intensely interested in helping seniors. They began using UMass nursing students in Chicopee and with the "magnificent help of Jean Haggerty" began using six nursing students at the Ann Whalen House to work with seniors, but they were unable to place the students at the Wellness Center with the nurse. The Advisory Group has a strong desire to continue to have a relationship between the community and the School of Nursing because it provides a valuable learning experience for the students and benefits area elders. They are looking for specific direction on how they can be helpful based on facts and seniors' needs.

Nancy explained the transition of supervision of the nurse from the Senior Center Director to the Board of Health. Since then, the nurse schedule of 8 hours per week has been erratic, her work is less visible to the Senior Center, health seminars have not been held and the health department has not given us an evaluation of the nurse's work. Outreach is very limited and we realize the need is great. Even at the Ann Whalen House there are numerous seniors who cannot go to the nurse – they need the nurse to come to them for wellness checks. Surely there are more seniors in the community at large with that same need. Nancy is hopeful that the Advisory Group along with 2 volunteers from the COA could meet and discuss an approach to move us toward the goal of greater outreach – one of the FY 2008 objectives. Dan Clapp and Rosemary Kofler volunteered to meet with the Advisory Committee on a monthly basis.

Elsie mentioned a program in Vermont that involves a nurse going to senior homes to assess needs. Ellie indicated that to establish such a program it is critical to have data to demonstrate the need that exists in order to get funding. It is important that we get information on outcomes and an evaluation of the Nursing Center from the Amherst Health Department.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

Accessing unmet needs meeting update:

Ed arranged and conducted an open forum for all seniors who use the Senior Center to talk about problems they may have in accessing services at the center. In Ed's absence Rosemary spoke of the main issues raised by the 10 or so people who attended the meeting. 1) problems with transition to MV elder van service 2) limited free parking spaces and 3) the need for a 24-hour hotline for seniors. Nancy felt good about the meeting – the Senior Center did not seem inaccessible and does seem to be carrying out its mission.

Ed will follow up with the parking permit issue when he is back in town. Gerry sent an e-mail to the Town Manager to alert him of the parking permit issue.

Ed will not be able to come to COA meetings for three months because of a special course he will be taking. He will continue to work on special projects for the COA however.

Budget Update and Reorganization Talk:

Nancy referred us to a handout on the budget and FY '08 objectives. The objectives were reviewed regarding: 1) developing a disaster and emergency preparedness plan 2) to seek additional funding for the counseling center 3) to provide a safety net for elders struggling with PVTa transportation gaps 4) to establish a Friends group 5) to seek funding for an outreach worker. Nancy asked members for further suggestions for goals - there were none.

Gerry offered to put out requests for volunteers to the Select Board. The greatest need is for Meals on Wheels delivery. Maura suggested friendly visitor or companionship visits is another great need.

Volunteers should contact Marlene or Maura.

Shirley suggested having PVTa come to the Center to give instruction to seniors about riding the buses and reading bus schedules.

Gerry explained the budget cut of 4.3% was primarily due to the increase in health insurance costs. Every department will be treated equally per Town Manager. He said that the entire budget would increase by 1% over last year.

Nancy pointed out where cuts were made – office supplies, center activities, Marlene's hours. She reminded us that Romney also proposes cutting the Formula Grant. It will be very difficult to manage with such cuts.

Friends Update:

Nancy said that since the legal Town Counsel has changed by the TM, the status of the Friends decision was delayed. Nancy has been in touch with Deb Jankowski who has worked with us previously. Nancy, Deb, Larry Shafer and John Musante plan to meet and discuss how to proceed.

Data Sharing Policy:

Elsie requested a summary of funds in the Senior Trust, the Travel Club and the Senior Club so that COA members would be knowledgeable. Nancy provided a handout with a lot of detail. Members agreed that so much detail was not necessary – just a summary would be fine. Nancy said the financial books are always open for COA members to view.

Gerry feels that town finances will improve after this year. He proposed taking money from the Trust to augment Marlene's salary until the financial picture improves. Nancy said that our Trust is not an endowment and therefore to remove so much from those funds would be very risky.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Comprehensive Planning Committee:

Rosemary reported that the CPC had an orientation for new members – of the 28 members, the majority are new. Niels la Cour gave a history of the Planning work for the town since 1997. The CPC fell behind schedule and is still in the process of forming the seven Work Groups of 12 members each. Those groups will meet on January 23 to take the ideas generated in the Idea Gathering Sessions and look at ways to make them a reality and develop them into a Master Plan.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

Elsie reported that this month they featured one of the programs funded by HVES. It was a musical event featuring a couple in their 80s who met at Elder Housing.

Reorganization:

Nancy said that Larry Shafer, TM, sent a memo to all the Bangs Department Heads to attend a meeting on December 20 to talk about reorganization – a stressful term. Larry does not like one-person departments and he would like to merge some departments. An outgrowth of that meeting is that the Human Rights, Veteran's and Human Resources Departments will likely be merged. More changes may come in the future.

COA STAFF REPORTS

Counseling Center Update:

Maura supplied a handout with statistics from Edy Howe, PhD. One problem is the doctoral students decide in the spring where they will be doing their placements for the fall. HVES Title 3 grant applications get written in August and the money does not come in until October, so we cannot guarantee funding for the students in advance. Edy knows of \$5,000 that could be available as grant money and HVES has a couple thousand dollars of undesignated funds. Paying a doctoral student \$7,000 would allow us to have a counselor at the center 10 hours per week. The program is still in its infancy. Nancy, Maura, Edy and Chris Overtree, head of the Psychological Counseling Center at UMass, need to meet to discuss their vision for how to grow the program. They need to decide on goals and would like to add a research component. HVES money is only seed money, therefore more funding is necessary.

Student Volunteers Wrap-up:

Marlene reported that this semester the Senior Center has had 16 student volunteers and 17 community volunteers. That does not include Meals on Wheels volunteers. She anticipates greater numbers next semester.

Elsie suggested announcing in every issue of the Senior Spirit the fact that elders in a certain income bracket who volunteer a certain number of hours can receive \$750.00 in property tax write-off.

The COA meeting was adjourned at 10:40 AM.

The next meeting will be held on February 8, 2006 at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary